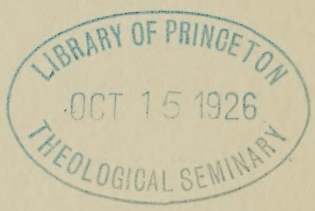
The Word Abideth

THOMAS TRACY WALSH



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BY

THE REV. THOMAS TRACY WALSH

AUTHOR OF "FACTS AND PRINCIPLES," ETC.

With an Introduction by

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Bishop of New York

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INTRODUCTION

THERE has been recently much discussion about the Bible. The minds of many are confused by these controversies. Some are inclining towards a rigid literalism which leaves no place for reason in the consideration of the sacred books. Others are being led to suppose that the authority of the Bible, and of the revelation which it brings to us, have been in some degree weakened by the results of what is known as the Higher Criticism.

This little book brings a helpful and reassuring message to those who are thus troubled and uncertain. In clear and simple language it shows that in the full light of modern

knowledge the spiritual message of the Bible and the Divine Revelation which it contains, stand clearer and more real to us than ever before. We need have no fear that scholarly investigation will destroy or weaken the authority of this Book.

The true test of the Bible lies in its reverent and faithful use, and in sincere effort to follow its teachings. Whoever reads the Bible in this spirit will find that it speaks to him with a moral power, a spiritual authority, a Divine message which his soul recognizes as from God Himself. If the teachings of the Bible were followed, misery and selfishness and injustice would vanish from the earth. Wars would cease. Righteousness and brotherhood and peace would reign. The Kingdom of Heaven would come among us.

Apart from all theories as to the manner of its inspiration, these facts proclaim it to be the Book of God.

WILLIAM T. MANNING,
Bishop of New York.

COMMENDATIONS

Mr. Walsh sends out a volume which should be a messenger of comfort and hope to all who read it. It deals with the real authority of the Bible in life and in the formation of true character in men and women.

I feel sure that its best effect will be to reintroduce the Holy Scriptures into many hearts and homes and there let them speak for themselves.

I warmly commend the book for its laudable purpose and trust it will have a wide circulation among all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth.

S. PARKES CADMAN, D.D.
President, Federal Council,
Churches of Christ in America.

The author of THE WORD ABIDETH has given us the well accredited assurance of the "impregnable rock" of the saving truth of the enduring Book in the face of all modern research, of all criticism, high and low, of all light of scientific investigation and discovery.

He sets forth some of the claims and results of the modern criticism with clearness and calmness, but with "rooted judgment" of the believer grounded in the faith. He has no fear of the truth. He would not say that the last word of the newer revealments, which he modestly accepts and which some of his readers may question, has been spoken. He would readily admit with Bishop Butler that "the Bible contains many truths yet undiscovered."

JOHN W. HAMILTON, D.D.,
Bishop and Chancellor Emeritus,
American University, Washington, D. C.

The author of this most interesting and helpful book has made a valuable contribution to the right understanding and interpretation of the Holy Bible. While the book is entirely sound and orthodox from beginning to end, the writer has successfully corrected many popular mistakes which have become more or less current in these recent years of doubt and confusion.

In addition to what he has said about the effect of new learning in giving us an increased confidence in the truth of the Bible, Mr. Walsh has given a brief treatise on the interpretation of the Bible which adds greatly to the value of his book. He reminds us in a striking and convincing way that the relation of the Church to the Bible, when properly understood, throws

much light upon the interpretation or meaning of the Bible itself.

We can well be grateful to our author therefore, for his valuable supplement on interpretation.

ETHELBERT TALBOT, D.D.,
Formerly Presiding Bishop,
Protestant Episcopal Church in America.

THE WORD ABIDETH

I

"I AM so much perplexed by present controversies about the Bible, Science, and the fundamentals of religion, that I know not what to believe nor where to look for guidance and final authority in such matters."

These words of one Christian layman express the sentiments of thousands. The Bible, the Church and reason have been named as sources of authority that have been provided to Christians for their religious guidance and in a large sense they are such. Many would choose one of these sources as infallible and others find safety in a combination of the three.

However, it is claimed that each of these three is limited by the natural

frailties of humanity and their absolute infallibility is questioned by many. The Word of God is infallible, but are all of the channels of its revelation inerrant?

Whether rightly or not, it is a fact that a large number of Christians look not to the Church or to reason for authority in religion, but to the Bible alone. In this Book we have a record of the progressive manner in which God's Word for man was revealed through the Holy Spirit, culminating in the final revelation of the Word in Christ. The Bible contains and in a sense, *is* the Word of God, but it comes to us through human limitations. It is the discussion of these limitations that is a cause of anxiety to many earnest Christians; they feel that God's Word is being assailed and discredited by critics and scientists. The ap-

plication of modern scientific methods to the study of the Bible has resulted in a point of view that is regarded by many pious people as dangerous to faith and destructive of Biblical authority. The situation is one that should be met with sympathy and a real desire to help.

It is a very serious matter to have one's religious faith unsettled even when such faith has been misapplied, for reconstruction is sometimes a more difficult process than destruction. Therefore when a new foundation or basis of faith is presented, it should be not only reasonable but of assured soundness. Those who have been extreme and uncompromising in their religious opinions are prone to re-act beyond moderation when they become convinced that their former beliefs were not altogether well founded.

There are Christians familiar with only one form of religion and a Church considered to be infallible. Therefore when one of these renounces his old faith, there may come the impulse to repudiate all religious faith and be an agnostic or worse.

Some extreme Protestants who have regarded the Bible with a feeling of awe and believed it to be infallible in every respect, meet with a similar experience. Having accepted scientific theories which seem to conflict with Biblical statements, there is an inclination to disregard reason and reject all belief in a divinely revealed religion. A great deal may be said for the maxim that truth is generally found in a safe position between extremes.

As a boy I did not accept literally the Genesis stories of the Creation, Fall and Flood; I did not be-

lieve that Balaam's ass spoke or that Jonah lived for three days in the belly of a whale. Yet when I entered a theological seminary as student and found that some of the Professors accepted the general results of what is known as Higher criticism of the Bible, there was indignation and perplexity within me. Under their instruction from the new point of view, the value of this precious Book was increased as a reliable guide in the sphere of religious truth. Because of the prevalent religious controversies and the atmosphere of general distrust, it may be well to state that the minimum of my religious beliefs is contained in the Apostles' Creed accepted without any interpretations which deny the facts of Christ's Deity, His Virgin Birth and actual Resurrection in a spiritual body.

II

ONE who does not endorse all of the conclusions of the critics may be tolerant enough to recognize the value of modern methods of Bible study. He may also feel that the present anxiety concerning them is unwarranted and endeavor to show that such methods of study have not detracted from the permanent value of the Bible as a vehicle of the inspired Word of God.

Biblical scholars have not questioned or assailed the Word of God, rather their work has been confined to a study of the Book which records the manner of its revelation. It is unfortunate that the word "criticism" was ever used with reference to the study of the Bible. To the average

mind, it suggests picking flaws and fault-finding, but such was not the original meaning of the term and the prejudice against it is groundless. It does not imply an hostile or irreverent attitude toward the Bible. While there are some radicals, it may be safely asserted that the majority of American and British critics are consecrated, loyal men of God, believing in miracles and not rejecting the stories of the Virgin Birth of Christ.

Biblical criticism is defined as "the application of scientific methods to the textual and literary study of the Bible." Higher criticism pertains to the literary and Lower criticism to the textual study of the books of the Bible. It should here be stated that questions of date and authorship do not perforce involve the inspiration and credibility of a Biblical writer.

In his Outline of Christian Theology, p. 26, Dr. W. N. Clarke of Colgate University takes the position that "On all questions of date and authorship, critical inquiry has full rights. . . . If such investigation can legitimately destroy our confidence in the Bible, our confidence should by all means be destroyed. A rational faith will not shrink from investigation and Christians have no cause to fear it, for the Scriptures will bear examination. . . . To repress criticism is to invite unbelief."

There are orthodox Churches which have never officially endorsed any one position as to the origin and inspiration of the books of the Bible. Their clergy are required to be "persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in

Jesus Christ." All members are free to have beliefs upon such subjects as the origin and inspiration of the Bible and its relation to science.

Whatever may have been the attitude of the early Reformers toward the Bible there are thousands of Christians today who, rejecting the authority of an "infallible Church," accept as a substitute an "infallible Book." Opinions and theories, whether literary or scientific, which conflict with Biblical statements upon any subject, are regarded as contradictions of God's Word. It has been asserted that if modern critical views of the Bible become generally accepted, the foundations of Protestantism will inevitably be destroyed. Many are perplexed and antagonized by Bible criticism and the much debated theory of man's creation through

process of evolution from lower animals for the reason that they have committed themselves to a belief in the literal and verbal inspiration of the Bible "from cover to cover."

Such a view of inspiration leads to complications and controversies. It is not only unsafe, but it is not necessary for belief in what the Bible is really intended to teach. It is also unwarranted by the official formularies and documents of some of the leading Christian denominations. Many of the prominent exponents of modern Biblical criticism are found in the ministry of these churches and they are men whose godliness and good standing are unchallenged.

It must be admitted, however, that in some of these denominations a very large number of the clergy and laity believe in the verbal inspiration and

inerrancy of the Scriptures in all points, and are very militant on this subject. I have the name of a minister in a Southern state who withdrew his children from the Public school because the Geographies used taught contrary to the Bible concerning the shape of the earth and the motion of the sun. It is said that in a city of the Middle West, where a single sect is in control, the Geographies must teach that the earth is flat and the sun moves back and forth in the skies. There are a few who believe that the English of the King James version of the Bible is the inspired original. One layman has asserted in protest against the Revised version, that St. Paul's English is good enough for him.

While we look upon the King James version as a masterpiece and

model of beautiful English, scholars claim that in it are several hundred ambiguous or obsolete words. No translation of the Scriptures is absolutely perfect because the meaning of some words and sentences in the original is unintelligible. And while the King James version is by no means to be discarded, the student without a modern translation such as the Revised version, is at a disadvantage.

With regard to inspiration, it is safest and wisest to believe that the Holy Scriptures contain the inspired Word of God and all things necessary for belief to salvation, without any fixed theory as to the mode of inspiration.

Dr. T. M. Lindsay of the United Free Church of Scotland, in his History of the Reformation, Vol. I, p. 264, says: "the authoritative character

and infallibility belong really and primarily to the word of God, and only secondarily to the Scripture,—to the Scripture only because it is the record which contains, presents or conveys the word of God. It is this word of God, this personal manifestation to us for our salvation, of God in His promises, which is authoritative and infallible; and the Scripture shares these attributes only so far as it is a vehicle of spiritual truth."

III

THE critical study of the Bible in some form has been in progress from early ages of Christian history and it has been deemed necessary for any real advancement in Bible study. What is called modern criticism is not a mere search for flaws and errors, but it involves a careful study of the Bible in every aspect of its literature, such as thought, language, style, history dates, numbers, environment, allusions, origins and modes of life.

Destructive critics are in the minority and as a whole critical study has proved to be help instead of a menace. By use of it we learn that many of the books of the Bible are composite or anonymous compilations of

writings copied thousands of times by various hands during many centuries. We learn also that it was the custom of the Scribes and others to write comments or explanations on the margins of the sheets. These are called glosses, and during the ages, many of them crept into the sacred text through the carelessness of copyists.

While history among all primitive peoples was in the form of ballads and folklore, the Hebrew and kindred races excelled in the art of telling stories. They had little conception of history as such or the property rights of authors, and they frequently placed the productions of several persons in one book under the name of one noted person.

It could not be expected that Higher critics would be absolutely unanimous in their conclusions, but so

far as I have been able to ascertain all are in practical agreement in the opinions briefly outlined below:

"Although the art of writing was known five thousand years before Christ, the Book of Genesis as we now have it, was compiled at a late period, much of it, during the Exile. The stories of the Creation and Flood were common to Semitic races far more ancient than the Hebrew branch, but were purified by Jewish writers of their grossness and polytheism, yet made to illustrate the ideas of primitive man concerning God and nature. The story of the Fall of man is as much a parable as that of the Prodigal Son and symbolizes the awakening of the individual and the race to a consciousness of sin.

While these stories are not strictly historical, they teach divine truth and

impart great moral lessons to all who read them. The Ten Commandments or Words were originally in the form of short sentences easy to remember, such as "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy," and the remaining portions were explanations subsequently added.

Although some portions may be of Mosaic origin the first five books of the Bible are not exclusively compositions of Moses, but are of various dates and origins. Much of the two books of Chronicles is of very late composition and of doubtful value as history. Only a small portion of the Psalms were written by David and many of them originated during and after the Exile.

The book called Isaiah is compos-

ite, and the latter portion beginning at Chapter XL, while wonderfully inspired, is the utterance of a prophet later than Isaiah. The book bearing the name of Daniel was written about four hundred years after the period assigned to Daniel's captivity. The book of Job is a dramatic allegory in defence of God's attitude toward human suffering, and the book of Jonah is a missionary parable in rebuke of Jewish exclusiveness.

It may be noted here not as matter of criticism but a fact of history, that it was as late as the year 90 of the Christian era when the Jews in Council at Jamnia decided to exclude the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus from the Old Testament and admit Canticles and Esther. Also, that the final catalogue of the books of the New Testament as we now have them,

was not completed until near the close of the fourth century.

From the earliest centuries of Christianity, there has been uncertainty about the authorship of Hebrews, 2d Peter, Jude and Revelation, and the identity of John the Apostle with John the Elder is still a matter of question. St. Luke's authorship of the Acts and the authenticity of the Epistles attributed to St. Paul are generally admitted, although the Epistles to Timothy and Titus may be of composite authorship.

Concerning the Gospels, it is believed that while St. Mark's in its present form is the oldest, it, together with St. Matthew and St. Luke, is based upon former writings which have disappeared. While the authorship of the Fourth Gospel continues to be a matter of disagreement, many

of the best scholars adhere to the tradition that its source is St. John or one of his disciples.

It would require a volume of several hundred pages to present all of the deductions from a critical study of the sixty-six books of the Bible, but the above is sufficient for our information. While one may not feel prepared to endorse unreservedly all of these conclusions of the critics, there is nothing in them to warrant the anxiety and indignation that are being shown by many pious people. Any orthodox Christian could accept all of them with no weakening of his belief in the Bible as containing the inspired Word or Revelation of God to man and his infallible standard for faith and religious life. This is the real ground for the existence of this sacred Book.

Just and reverent critical study has not weakened the spiritual influence and authority of the Bible, rather its position has been more strongly emphasized and established as our divine text-book in matters of religion. Canon Driver, a devout scholar, has said: "Criticism presupposes inspiration. . . . It seeks to determine the conditions under which it operates and the literary forms through which it manifests itself and thus it helps to frame a true conception of the methods which it has pleased God to employ in revealing Himself to His ancient people of Israel and in preparing the way for fuller manifestation of Himself in Christ Jesus."

IV

BELIEF in inspiration does not imply the absolute inspiration and accuracy of every statement found in the Bible. St. Paul teaches us in his First Epistle to the Corinthians that all of the words of an inspired writer may not be inspired. We are not required to accept as the Word of God all of the salutations, the domestic and business directions at the close of his Epistles. We are not bound to believe that the earth is flat, having four corners, that heaven has streets paved with gold, neither could we place the genealogies in the Gospels on a par with the words of our Lord Himself. In fact it is hazardous to tie ourselves down to an exclusive theory of inspiration.

We are taught that the Holy Ghost spoke by the Prophets, but does this mean certain men or the writings attributed to them? It would seem wiser to believe in the inspiration of persons rather than books. Whether Moses, David or Isaiah wrote all that has been ascribed to them, we can believe in the inspiration of Moses the Law-giver, David the Psalmist and Isaiah the Prophet. Critics are unanimous that inspiration reaches its highest point in the Psalmists and Prophets.

The canonization of the Scriptures by the Jewish and Christian Churches should not be confused with the question of the inspiration of the writers. The basic truths of our religion are not entirely dependent upon what is called inspiration. I believe in the inspiration of the writers of the four

Gospels, but it would not be necessary for me to believe in their special inspiration if I were assured of their honesty, intelligence and reliability as witnesses of what they had seen and heard and that we have a correct record of their writings.

There is a difference between inspiration and revelation. A person might be a medium of revelation and lack inspiration, or inspired without being a channel of revelation. As Dr. Fairbairn says: "Authority belongs to the Bible not as book but as a revelation, not because it has been canonized (by the Church) but because it contains the history of our Redeemer and our redemption. . . . Revelation is thus as to its accidents, a literary question, but as to its essence, a spiritual experience."

The effect of God's Spirit is not

always of the same order, it deals more with ideas than with words. The Bible shows not a single revelation, but in various stages, in divers times and portions as men were able to receive it. When the human race was in its childhood spiritually, intellectually, and in morals, God spoke in ideas and terms suitable to primitive man. Man also spoke of God and represented Him from a very human and primitive point of view, attributing to Him many of the characteristics, actions and passions of men. They spoke of God's face, eyes, nostrils, hands, arms and feet. Fiendish cruelties committed by men were ascribed to the command of God.

If in the Bible God is represented by qualities and actions that are repellent to the highest instincts of humanity and directly contrary to the

Gospel as proclaimed by Christ, such statements do not require labored efforts in explanation, but should be accepted as reflections of the ignorance and barbarity of the times. They are not in any sense divinely inspired models of theology or morals for Christian people.

While all of the laws and regulations of the Old Testament are not binding upon us as criterions of morals for this age, they were the best for the ancient people and prepared the way for the moral standards of Christianity. Although the people of ancient times were crude in their notions of God, of morals and of life, the Word of God was not to be hindered in reaching men in such ways as they were able to receive, assimilate and make it known unto others. Indeed this was the method

employed by God the Son when on earth He came to complete the revelation of the Word to man.

For the most part ancient history was poetry and folk lore while modern history is prose and the result of scholarly research. A large portion of the Old Testament is poetry. When we read that the sun and moon stood still, the stars came down and fought against Sisera, the hills skipped like lambs, the trees sang and clapped their hands, we are reading pure poetry.

The Bible is not supposed to teach history or medicine as abstract sciences; it does not contain a complete cosmology of the universe, it is not our text-book on Antropology, Biology, Geography or Geology. If God's revelation had come to the ancient Hebrews in terms and ideas foreign to their own age they would never

have been able to receive or apply it. Four thousand years hence our descendants may marvel at the crudeness of the twentieth century.

If it be admitted that the Bible contains allegory, poetry and legend which have little historical basis, how is the reader to distinguish truth from fiction or identify God's revelation of truth? To this question the reply is that in both the Old and New Testaments from Genesis to Revelation, an allegory or anecdote, a poem or a parable is the Word of God so far as it conveys a true lesson in faith, morals or any right phase of religion and life, while the events and persons named may be fictitious.

Bishop Chares Gore, one of the great scholars of this age, and a bulwark of orthodoxy in the Church of England, writes: "We must start from

the solid historical ground of the written prophets. We must re-assure ourselves on this solid ground of the reality of God's Self revelation. Then we shall find ourselves believers of a surety that God did 'in many parts and many manners speak in old times unto the fathers by the prophets.' . . . The Spirit Who is really God, spake by the prophets. . . . That is the essential thing. Then We shall recognize how the prophetic spirit gradually purged and re-interpreted the folk-lore and traditions of Israel to express moral and religious truth instead of empty falsehood, and how there were different grades and kinds of inspiration in psalmists and wise men and codifiers of the law and compilers of stories for moral edification, all in different degrees inspired by the divine Spirit. So viewed, the Old

Testament becomes not only more interesting, but also holds its unique spiritual value not in opposition to but in harmony with historical criticism."

V

ONE of the most serious grievances against Biblical critics is that "they have weakened belief in the miraculous elements of the Old Testament." Considered as such, miracles in the Old Testament are not discredited by critics. Provided they have an historical background as strong as the miracles of Jesus, they are admitted. It is claimed, however, that some of these will not stand the tests of history, good morals or pure religion. The character of the literature which records them is also to be considered; much of it is rated as folk-lore in the form of anecdotes, poetry and quotations from documents of obscure origin such as the book of Jasher. But such conditions do not

apply to all of these narratives nor detract from the truly religious lessons taught by many of these stories. Jesus invented stories to convey moral and religious truths.

A true interpretation of the history of the Jews warrants our belief in the need of a divine intervention in many crises of their national life. Critics assure us that they have not rejected the miraculous or the supernatural from the Old Testament, that they have not questioned any portion of the Bible that is of real and permanent value to the Christian believer in the Word of God.

The fact that Jesus spoke of the Law as written by Moses and the Psalms by David, and that He refers to the Flood, Daniel and Jonah, has been used by some as a conclusive argument against the opinions of crit-

ics as to the authorships, chronology and narratives of the Old Testament. To this argument the general reply of modern Bible students is that our Lord's references in these cases do not involve any *teaching* upon literary or scientific questions.

Prof. H. R. McIntosh of Edinburgh, in his volume on "The Person of Christ," p. 13, says: "To invest His words with legal authority in matters of Bible criticism and history is wholly misleading and irrelevant. The realm of scientific knowledge is one in which He became like unto his brethren." As in the Old Testament, so in the New, all divine teaching was adapted to the limitations of the people who received it. It would have been in accordance with our Lord's methods of teaching had He used language or illustrations in line

with current ideas and traditions, without endorsing them as correct.

This method is very obvious in the parables. The reference to Abraham's bosom is a noteworthy example and is classed with the mention of the Flood and Jonah and the great fish. The Jews referred to the whole Penteteuch as "Moses" although the Scriptures nowhere say that Moses wrote the Book of Genesis. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the Psalter is called "David." In like manner today, we cite "Webster" for the definition of words coined long after the death of the compiler of Webster's Dictionary. In the first century, A.D., "The Prophets" was understood to include the historical books beginning at Judges, and "The Psalms" included several other books beside the Psalter.

Writers of unassailable orthodoxy

say with reverence, that if it were possible that our Lord, under the limitations of His humanity, did not know the authorship and dates of the Old Testament Books, it would be in keeping with His own assertion that He did not know the time of His Second Coming. A discussion of the theological questions concerning our Lord's human consciousness may not be desirable here, but we may be sure that whatever the limits to which He subjected Himself in order to become really man, they do not conflict with our belief in the absolute Deity of Christ, as God the Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.

The question as to the infallibility of the Bible has a superb answer in Dr. Patterson Smyth's book "How God Inspired the Bible": "The Bible

is infallible in revealing God and teaching men all that is necessary for salvation. It is infallible in pointing men to Christ and leading them to higher and holier lives. . . . All that it teaches about faith in God, in Christ, in truth, in righteousness, in moral love in the wisdom of a life spent in the fear of God, has proved its absolute trustworthiness. . . . Here the Bible is infallible, and let us remember that it is the only infallibility required of it."

It is the conscientious conviction of Biblical critics that instead of being a source of skepticism their work has furnished a wealth of aids to more devout and intelligent Bible study: It has brought to bear upon the literature of the Bible the results of research in such sciences as Archaeology, Astronomy, Ethnology, Geology

and History. The literature and relics of other nations have been utilized to corroborate or explain obscure or inconsistent passages in both the Old and New Testaments. Modern critical methods have furnished a more accurate mental grasp of the thought and life of the ancient Hebrews and their neighbors. They have also given us a better understanding of the age in which our Lord lived and the external influences that are reflected in the New Testament writings.

Critics believe that the supreme result of their work consists in greater facilities of discrimination between the divine and human elements in the Bible; separating more of the pure gold of God's Word from its alloys, thus enabling the reader to perceive and concentrate upon the essential matters of faith and spiritual life.

This modern attitude toward the Bible in its inspiration, history, and literature is maintained in many theological seminaries and Bible classes. It is the point of view that prevails in some of our best colleges and universities. There are but few Biblical dictionaries and commentaries issued during the past decade, that do not assume it. Notwithstanding its strong establishment in the realm of scholarship, there are many earnest Christians who regarding it as a menace to evangelical Christianity, would firmly resist its advance. There are others who like Gamaliel of old, will not contend against it lest they be found fighting against God.

I am neither a Fundamentalist nor a Modernist according to the common use of these terms, and I certainly do not endorse all of the opinions of Bib-

lical critics. They themselves do not claim permanence for all of their conclusions, and during the coming years of research, there may be changes in some of their positions. It is due to them and to the Christian masses that the results of their work should become more generally known, also that efforts should be made to re-assure those who feel that the Word of God is being discredited by critics and men of science.

It should be enough for us Christians that "every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness." These sacred documents were "written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." What matters it then, if men in all ages have

differed in their ideas of Biblical literature and life, or held various theories as to the manner in which God's Word has been revealed? Whatever is divine will stand every test.

In all of the writings, discussions and debates on this subject, it should be emphasized that the ultimate authority is not a book but the Word of God which became flesh and dwelt among us, as a Person. Jesus Christ in His nature, in all that He taught and did, was and ever abides as, the Living Word of God.

"Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth. For

All flesh is grass,
And all the glory thereof as the
flower of grass.

The grass withereth and the flower falleth.
But the word of the Lord abideth forever.

And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you."
(1st Peter. I. 23-25. R. V.)

VI

WE are convinced that with due allowance made for all human elements in the Bible, the revelation of divine truth remains there in all of its potency. Also that in the religious teachings of Christ the Living Word, we have an "infallible rule of faith and practice." Yet there remains the question of interpretation which has been a source of controversy and division among Christians for a long period. Is the average man or woman qualified to interpret the Bible according to individual judgment or is the Church the duly authorized interpreter of Holy Writ?

For many centuries there was only one answer to this question, but dur-

ing the Reformation in the sixteenth century there arose the clearly drawn issue between Church authority and private judgment. Among many of the Continental reformers these were considered to be mutually antagonistic and there was little conception of a possible reconciliation. The right of private judgment was one of the fundamental principles of early Protestantism and it is still asserted by that type of Christianity which demands an open Bible with absolutely unrestricted freedom of interpretation by the individual.

The faculty by which we judge and decide is an essential element of our personality and it is involved in the very process of thought. Before I can accept the judgment of another as my authority upon any subject, I must exercise my own faculty of judg-

ing his judgment. This faculty is inherent in that freedom of the will with which every human being is endowed. In the sphere of religion, this right of every man to interpret the Scriptures as reason and conscience may dictate, is considered one of the precious heritages of Protestantism to be kept inviolate regardless of cost or consequences.

And yet it is a tragic fact of Christian history and experience that the great evils of heresy and schism and many absurd teachings and customs have come from the misuse of this privilege. It has been said that Protestantism with its assertion of this right, tends toward either schism or rationalism. It would not be unjust to say that many of the sects and heresies now existing in the Christian world are traceable to assertions of

the right of private judgment. It was during the early years of the Reformation period that Protestants began to disagree concerning the interpretation of the Bible and under their leaders, divide into organized sects. Today their descendants are found in the more than one hundred religious bodies that claim a place in the world as Christian churches.

There is one section of Protestantism which takes pride in the fact that it has "no creed but the Bible." Nevertheless this particular section is divided into twenty-three denominations with distinctive names. The large outstanding Protestant denominations, including their numerous subdivisions, justify their positions in Christianity to a large extent by the Holy Scriptures. Not only in former ages but in these times many sects

have had their birth from the peculiar views of individuals concerning the teachings of the Bible. Mr. Blank or Mrs. Block, after diligent reading of the Scriptures, says: "At last! I have found the true doctrine and the true Church. Let every one accept my exposition of the Bible and all of the problems of religion and life will be solved."

The Christian Scientists, the Mormons, the various types of Millenarians, the followers of Voliva,—all sorts of Christian sects prove their doctrines and justify their positions by the Bible. While some interpretations are so literal as to be grotesque, others have pressed the figurative or rationalistic methods to the extent of explaining away the reality of any revelation from God in either the Old or New Testaments. The principle

of "the competency and freedom of the individual to choose for himself in all religious matters," when unduly stressed, may lead one from Christianity into a society of ethical culture which could include Buddhists, Jews and Agnostics. The use of modern critical methods of Bible study has proved to be a most valuable aid to sound interpretation or exegesis but like many other good things, even this may be carried to a dangerous extreme.

VII

ADMITTING that many of the divisions and other evils that afflict Christianity are due to a wrong use of the Bible by individuals and their followers, there yet remain the questions of the authority of the Church and of which branch of the Church. As now existing, the Church is composed of branches or sects each claiming to be justified in their positions of separation. In some of these branches it is claimed that the Church is not only best qualified but duly authorized to interpret the Scriptures, especially in matters of doctrine, discipline and worship. If the Church was founded by Christ it is a divine institution or organism, possessing au-

thority in questions of religion and morals.

But does this authority extend to the right of the interpretation of the Scriptures for the religious guidance of its members? The Jewish and Christian Churches produced the Bible, and the Christian Church was organized and at work for a generation before any of the present New Testament was written. Whether officially or not, the Church as "the Witness and Keeper of Holy Writ," decided which are the canonical books of the New Testament. *The Word of God* came before the Church, and therefore it is not as a revelation but as a book that the Bible is dependent upon the decision of the Church as to its contents. The Church is not founded upon the New Testament, but upon the Person of Jesus Christ,

the Living Word of God, yet all of our knowledge concerning our Saviour's life, teaching and redemptive work, comes from the New Testament. Those who lived nearest to the time of the writers of the New Testament and certify as to the genuineness of the books should be well qualified to testify as to the teachings of those books, and the Church in her Councils has ratified the opinions of these early Christian Fathers.

There can be no translation of the Bible without an interpretation of the original and the individual who approves of a particular version is accepting someone's interpretation of the Scriptures. It is generally admitted that the Apostle's Creed adopted by the Church is based upon Bible teachings, therefore, every subscription to this Creed is an acceptance of

the authority of the Church to make its own interpretation of the Scriptures and set it forth in a Creed. Any person who approves of a set Articles of Religion, a Confession of Faith or a Book of Discipline, thereby admits the authority of an organized body called the Church, to interpret the Scriptures for its members.

Dr. C. A. Briggs, in his "Theological Symbolics," p. 268, says: "The Protestant principle that the Scripture was its own interpreter, and that doubtful passages were to be interpreted in accordance with those that were not doubtful is most excellent. But who shall decide as to these passages? In fact both Protestants and Roman Catholics are right; and their principles are complementary and not exclusive. We must recognize that, while Scripture ordinarily interprets

itself to the right minded, yet this is not always the case; and that the final judgment is with the Church, and not with the individual provided the Church does not decide against the truth and righteousness." Although Dr. Briggs does not explain what he means by "the Church" in the sentence above, it is certain that he does not refer to the Roman Church.

There is no necessary conflict between Church authority and individual judgment provided neither is stressed beyond reasonable limits. The present tendency is to supplement the authority of the Bible and the Church with that of reason, which both Roman Catholics and ultra-Protestants ignored in the sixteenth century. One exaggerated Church authority while the other almost obliterated it. The Protestant extremist, accepting the

Bible to the exclusion of reason, develops into a fanatic, while the Roman Catholic, stressing Church authority beyond reasonable bounds is in danger of bigotry. Not rationalism but reason will have a large share in the solution of the religious problems of the present generation.

VIII

ALTHOUGH the Christian Church produced the New Testament, this group of writings testifies as to the history, doctrine, discipline, worship, and government of the Apostolic Church. As the Bible, especially the New Testament, contains our standard of religion and right living, there are many who believe that the Church is God's ordained teacher, in these things using the Bible as her Divinely inspired text-book.

So long as Christianity is divided into many denominations there will be confusion as to what is meant by "the Church." The term is used with reference to a denomination and also to describe Christianity in general.

Each of the one hundred denominations bases its doctrine upon its own interpretation of the Scriptures and expects its members to submit to the teachings of "the Church." It is obvious that until organic Church unity is accomplished, there can be no authorized interpretation of the Bible other than that of some branch or sect, and each individual must look to his own denomination for guidance in doctrine and religious life. Or if the dogma proved from Scripture by his denomination is against his conscientious convictions, he may seek membership in one more to his liking. Against this advice is the objection that it encourages sectarianism; viewing the question from any position, we are made painfully conscious of the tragedy of a divided Christendom and the urgent need of something better.

The ancient and undivided Church of God, accepting the consensus of opinion and usage, decided which were the canonical books of the Bible, and today, a united, uncorrupted and comprehensive Church would afford the only solution to the vexed problem of interpretation. That united Church would not accept the individual opinions of the early Fathers, nor of Augustine, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Arminius, Cranmer, Wesley, nor any pope. It would take the consensus of opinions and the organic reason of the Church in all ages, including the present, guided by the Holy Spirit. That Church would not presume to claim itself as the only channel of divine grace or truth, for "the Spirit moveth where He listeth." It would rejoice in His workings among those who refuse to

submit to its teachings, yet seeking in unity to proclaim the whole Gospel of Him who is the Living Word of God.

Waiting for this united Church to be restored to Christendom, each one should devoutly read his Bible trying as best he can to understand what he reads. And as the Ethiopian official sought guidance from St. Philip, a duly ordained minister of the Church, so should each look for religious instruction and doctrine to what he conceives to be "the Church."

While conceding the authority of the Church to teach dogma, it would be almost insane to suggest that a Christian in this age has no right to read his Bible and use his God-given reason to understand it. Any denomination, at least a Protestant one, that attempted such restriction would ex-

perience a convulsion. In 2d Peter, I. 20-21, it is said that "no prophecy of Scripture is of private (special) interpretation, for no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." The same Spirit who inspired the sacred writer must inspire and guide the reader. As a poetic mind is required to understand and appreciate poetry, so is the spiritual attitude necessary for the best results in reading God's Message to man.

Whatever may have been the original meaning of this passage in 2d Peter, we may infer from it that in order to interpret with a measure of correctness there must be some preparation and equipment. The judgment, like the conscience, needs to be enlightened and trained. And there

should be such qualifications as piety, faith, humility, wisdom and a fair amount of education, lest being "ignorant and unsteadfast, we wrest the Scriptures to our own destruction," being led by fanciful interpretations into strange doctrines and practices. The Bible student of this generation has at hand the results of the best scholarship of all denominations, set forth in Commentaries, Bible Dictionaries, etc., and while remaining loyal to the doctrinal teachings of his own denomination, he may gain from such aids a wealth of valuable information in other fields of Bible study.

Volumes have been written concerning methods of interpretation and the devotional study of the Bible. With this fact in mind, I have ventured to present another phase of the subject, the importance of which has not been

sufficiently realized by Protestants, namely the authority and part of the Church. God's Word is so simple that a child may gain some insight of its meaning, yet the Bible which records it contains passages so deep that all the learning of all the ages has not been able to fathom them. Let every man read and study this Greatest Book in the World with prayer that the Holy Spirit may direct the reason, open the heart and make clear the understanding, yet always relying for general guidance upon the collective judgment of that organization which to him is the Church of God.

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